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Alumni Presentation and Panel: Engaging the Past

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Alumni Presentation and Panel: Engaging the Past

*Denise James, moderator; Victoria Berthé, Veronica Morris,
LaShea Smith, J. W. Terry*

The Alumni Panel was held during lunch on January 27, 2016. It featured three black, Dayton-area, UD alumni: LaShea Smith, B.A. International Studies, 1991; Veronica Morris, B.A. Communications Management, 1992; and J.W. Terry, B.S. Business Economics, 2010, Master's of Public Administration, 2013. The alumni offered insightful perspectives on UD and race from their positions as graduates, as local business people, and, for one, as the mother of a UD student graduating in May 2016. The panelists were asked to prepare a short set of responses to two questions: 1) What were your most salient experience of race at UD? 2) Now, as a graduate of the university, what reflections about race on campus can you offer current students?

Each of the alumni had been active members of clubs and student groups on campus who sought to contribute to the community spirit of the university. All remarked upon how important faculty and other student support had been for them at UD. Central to each of their remarks was the point that they had succeeded at UD in spite of a campus climate that could be unwelcoming and sometimes hostile to black students. One

noted with regret how little UD seems to have changed in respect to the numbers of domestically diverse students and continued instances of racism. Another queried the audience for the presence of upper-level administrators [none attended], noting that conversations about [campus-]climate change and diversity needed to be had with people who controlled the financial direction of the university.

Those in attendance asked the alumni insightful questions about how to retain domestically diverse students and what they saw as the most important tasks for UD in our future efforts to become a more inclusive community. The answers varied from more of a focus on recruiting domestically diverse students in larger numbers to issues of retention through serious work on our campus's [social/racial] climate. The alumni panel was a sobering and much-needed account of the experiences black students have had at UD over the last few decades and challenged each of the audience members to press for greater attention to diversity as a vital part of the mission.